THE RAGTIMER

MARCH/APRIL 1975

PUBLISHED BY
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE
PRESERVATION OF
CLASSICAL RAGTIME

NOTICE OF CATALOGUE DELETIONS

The following SOCIETY REPRINT SHEET MUSIC is no longer available:

SR-010 Crab Apples-Rag Two Step (Wenrich) 1908
SR-128 Stewed Chicken (Glenn C. Leap) 1912

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RECORDS FOR SALE

As a service to members, THE RAGTIME SOCIETY INC. is currently in a position to have orders filled for the following records. All prices quoted include charge for postage.

GENESIS - $6. 50 each

GS1044 - Piano Rags by James Scott - played by John Jensen - 18 numbers (9 per side). Includes Frog Legs (1906) to Broadway Rag (1922).

GS1045 - Piano Rags by Joseph Lamb - played by John Jensen - 15 numbers - Side 1 includes Sensation (1908) to Patricia (1916). Side 2 includes Cottontail, Bird-Brain, Toad Stool, etc. being seven posthumous publications.

NONESUCH - $4. 50 each

H71284 - Piano Music by George Gershwin - played by William Bolcom - 27 numbers - includes Rialto Ripples, I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise, Piano Playin' Jazzbo Brown, and a broad range of well-known show tunes.

H71299 - Pastimes and Piano Rags - played by William Bolcom - Side 1 James Scott (1886-1938) 5 rags Efficiency, Modesty, New Era, Troubadour, Great Scott - Side 2 Artie Matthews (1888-1959) the 5 Pastime Rags No. 1 to No. 5 inclusive.

LONDON - $6. 50 each

DLQ3009 - More Scott Joplin Rags - The New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble conducted by Gunther Schuller - 12 numbers includes Gladiolus, Peacherine, Euphonic Sounds, Solace, Magnetic, Wall Street, Bethena.

LONDON - $8. 00 each

DL3010 - The Classic Rags of Joe Lamb - played by Milton Kaye - 13 numbers includes American Beauty, Cleopatra, Bohemia, Reindeer, The Ragtime Nightingale, Top Liner, Alaskan, INCLUDES BONUS RECORDING - Milton Kaye and Rudi Blesh discuss Ragtime literature.

FLYING DUTCHMAN - $6. 50 each

BDL1-0549 - Old Rags - played by The New Sunshine Jazz Band - 13 numbers includes The Smiler, Georgia Grind, Cum Bac, Ma Ragtime Baby, 12th Street, High Society, Oh Daddy.

FOUNDED 1962
INCORPORATED 1970

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non - profit corporation having the following objects:

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

PLAN NOW!

To attend a
RAGTIME PARTY
this fall.

At Toronto it's
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
11th Annual Bash
on the weekend of
SAT., OCT. 18, 1975.
(details come later in the year)

RAGTIME...
UNDER YOUR HAT

A number of members have written in to say that THE RAGTIMER has not arrived in the mail. Some comments may provide an explanation. In Canada, this year, there have been many interruptions in the postal services caused by rotating strikes in various parts of the country. Toronto has been a prime target in connection with these activities. Long delays through mail tie-ups are becoming all too commonplace and there is no end in sight. We hope those who did write have now received their copy. If any member receives the next following issue of THE RAGTIMER before the missing issue turns up we will expect to be notified. Meanwhile we have to go on suffering this inconvenience, still hoping that our mailouts eventually reach their destination.

As the years go by, those of us who have worked to keep THE RAGTIME SOCIETY a viable organization often draw encouragement from the gratuitous comments of members. Frequently the letters from members go unanswered because the "must" activities use up all the available time. We have confessed to this problem quite regularly. Nevertheless your comments are read. They sometimes include excellent suggestions and constructive criticism for the expansion and or improvement of the SOCIETY'S services and activities. When it means more work than we care to take on, we simply "shudder" our way out of it. For all that, please keep sending in your letters, clippings, reports of ragtime activities and related articles. Don't forget our letters from members column in which we extract excerpts believed to be of interest to members generally. Sometimes new members are disappointed to find that we do not operate

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a direct correspondence bureau about the various facets of ragtime. Apart from business transactions with individual members, THE RAGTIMER serves as our communications vehicle with our membership. In bearing with us you also help us to cope with a heavy burden.

The heartwarming side of all this has to do with the obvious interest in and enthusiasm being shown for ragtime and the efforts of THE RAGTIME SOCIETY. Members will often reflect on the friendliness of ragtimers and their willingness to help each other whenever they meet. Those comments which merely say "I enjoy my membership in the Society," "Keep up the good work," and "I look forward to reading each issue of The Ragtimer," are the kind which bring some assurance that what we are able to accomplish is worth the effort.

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STRATFORD FESTIVAL 1975

INTRODUCES THE MUSIC OF JOPLIN

The twenty-third season of the Festival at Stratford, Canada, is being held from June 9 to October 11. The program includes plays by William Shakespeare (Twelfth Night, Measure For Measure, Comedy of Errors, Two Gentlemen Of Verona). Society director Bill McCrostie drew our attention to a pleasant contrast in the program for Music in July. The Stratford Festival Ensemble will play a concert in the Festival Theatre on Sunday, July 13th which includes "JOPLIN ..... RED BACK BOOK".

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Collector's Nightmare

"Daddy! Daddy!" cried the small boy racing into the house -
"Yes, my son?" replied his father as he stopped pumping his latest piano roll find - Said his son:
"Did you know a piano roll stretches from our house to the corner?"

Not the Time of Day for Ragtime

Sign displayed in the door of a music store:
"Gone Chopin - Bach at two."

Gone are the Ragtime Days:

When a hit song stayed in circulation long enough for a fellow to learn the lyrics.

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RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

Fat Cat's Jazz FJC 107 'Parlor Social Piano', by Cliff Jackson

Selections: It Don't Mean A Thing; Old Fashioned Love; Beale Street Blues; Limehouse Blues; Save It Pretty Mama; After You've Gone; Careless Love; Keep Off The Grass; Arkansas Blues; Stomping At The Savoy; Everybody Loves My Baby; St. James Infirmary; Carolina Shout; Keeping Out Of Mischief Now; Somebody Stole My Gal; I Found A New Baby.

Available from: Fat Cat's Jazz Records, P. O. Box 458, Manassas, Virginia.

Cliff Jackson was a piano player in the Harlem 'rent party' style who moved from Washington, D. C. to New York City in the mid-1920's, thus coming directly into the home grounds of such prodigious giants of the keyboard as James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Luckey Roberts and Willie 'The Lion' Smith. Although Jackson was an excellent pianist, he lacked the invention and dazzling technique of these pioneers of this style of piano playing, and tended to be overshadowed by them.

Moreover, although Jackson, who died in the spring of 1970, considerably outlived many of the Harlem stride pianists of the 1920's, and though he remained a satisfying artist right up until his death, he still tended to remain in the background because men like Johnson and Waller had been extremely prolific recording artists whose work has remained generally available in reasonable quantity to compete for the consumer's dollar with the relatively few records which Jackson made.

The story of talented jazzmen living out their lives in undeserved obscurity is a familiar one to all of us, but fortunately for us and for Jackson, jazz booster Johnson McRee, promoter of the annual Manassas Jazz Festival, began using Jackson at his traditional jazz programs. This activity led to a reasonable amount of Jackson's work being preserved on wax in his later years.

One such effort is this welcome album of piano solos by Jackson. It is quite aptly titled, for the record has a parlor social atmosphere in several ways. First of all, the tunes are ones you might expect from a casual session by a Harlem pianist -- some of the fine old stride numbers, a couple of good popular tunes of the period (some familiar, some less so), and a few of the overworked numbers that occur naturally to every musician but which have frankly been beaten practically to death by many 'dixieland' bands. Second, the easygoing atmosphere is enhanced by a couple of amiable vocals (on 'Save It' and 'St. James') tossed in by the record's producer, Johnson McRee. Third, and this isn't particularly a plus, my copy of the LP has a slight surface noise that suggests that it might have been recorded on somebody's home tape recorder in his living room -- complete with a couple of background comments at the end of one track.

The music is the thing, though, and this record fairly demonstrates both Jackson's strengths and weaknesses. There are the rich, thick chords typical of the Harlem pianists, played with the bright, clear tone and confident approach associated with this style. Moreover, Jackson had a distinctive, relaxed sound within this idiom that works especially well on the medium tempo numbers, particularly 'Arkansas Blues', an excellent performance.

On the other hand, Jackson tended on this record to make too much use of two bass figures which were more effective when used more sparingly by other Harlem pianists -- a device of 'reversing the stride' for a few beats, and a type of rolling, half-boogie bass figure that Fats was also fond of. Moreover, Jackson's imagination flags on some of the numbers, where outstanding stride choruses stand side by side with relatively routine run-downs of the chord pattern of the tune.

In summary, this is a record that contains some fine piano playing by an under-recorded pianist. 'Everybody Loves My Baby' is a track that builds properly from the start, at a driving tempo with a solid stride. 'Old Fashioned Love', a fine tune that doesn't get played often enough, is given the full Harlem treatment -- starting with an out-of-tempo chorus, the track gathers momentum through succeeding choruses (plus the verse -- Jackson plays the verses on many of the numbers, and it is a delight to hear them) into a striding conclusion. Most of the other tracks contain some fine moments, and it is a special pleasure to hear anyone tackle such well-known, but seldom recorded, Harlem rags as Johnson's 'Carolina Shout' and 'Keep Off The Grass'.

As you can tell from the titles, there is a fair amount of piano on this record that walks the thin line between jazz and ragtime. If you lean pretty far toward the St. Louis or New Orleans ragtime styles, or if you haven't picked up many of the recent reissues of material by the top Harlem stride men, then maybe Jackson once again will be forced to take a back seat. But if you like the Harlem ticklers, and want an LP to remember Jackson by, I doubt that you'll be dissatisfied with this one.

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FROM PIANO THUMPING TO THE CONCERT STAGE - THE RISE OF RAGTIME

(Ed. Comment: The following is reprinted from the editorial contained in the Music Educators Journal for April, 1973. It was brought to our attention by member Geraldine Vondy of Denver, Colorado.)

It was the year that Utah became the forty-fifth state in the Union. Bill Sunday was beginning his famous career as an evangelist, motion pictures were about to be unveiled in their first public exhibition, and the Supreme Court was soon to hand down its "separate but equal" ruling. The New York World began publication of "The Yellow Kid" and created the modern comic strip, gold was discovered in the Yukon, and the first edition of Fannie Farmer's cookbook went on sale.

The cakewalk was in vogue, and 1896 was hardly more than a month old when Ben Harney, a 25-year old Kentuckian, introduced "jig piano" to New York society during engagements at Keith's Union Square Theater and later at Tony Pastor's. His keyboard syncopations launched a nationwide ragtime craze. By January of 1897, William Krell, a white bandleader from Chicago, had published his "Mississippi Rag", the first rag in print; and by the following December, Thomas Million Turpin of St. Louis had issued his "Harlem Rag", the first to be published by a black composer. The rise of classic ragtime had begun.

Ragtime, of course, did not appear overnight. It had been played for years by itinerant black "piano professors" who journeyed throughout the Mississippi Valley, "piano thumping" in all-night cafes, cabarets, saloons, pool halls, and sporting houses. The great names in ragtime came largely from river country: Scott Joplin from Texarkana, Texas; Tom Turpin and Louis Chauvin from St. Louis; James Scott from Neosho, Missouri; Arthur Marshall and Scott Hayden from Sedalia, Missouri; Percy Wenrich from Joplin, Missouri; Charlie Johnson from Kansas City, Kansas; and Antony Jackson and Jelly Roll Morton from New Orleans.

The music they played was first known as "jig piano". The term "ragtime" was also used among the players themselves, although it did not appear in print until the end of the century. Quite literally, the word meant "rag the time", or syncopate the rhythm. The jig piano style evolved as an imitation of both banjo and brass band music, and in those early days it involved a good deal of improvisation. The banjo idiom was copied in the pianist's syncopated lines for the right hand, while the influence of the march was reflected in the generally steady left-hand rhythm of the 2/4 meter, and the multiple-part structure that often resembled a rondo. In fact, some of the early published rags were subtitled "A Banjo Imitation", and many carried the direction "Tempo di marcia". (Acknowledging the brass band influence, pianist-composer Eubie Blake once referred to players in the later Eastern school as "ragtime march kings.")

Ragtime was heard throughout the Mississippi Valley, and in other regions as well, for perhaps twenty years before Harney, a white musician, awakened the nation's interest. That it was played far and wide before the general public was aware of it cannot be denied: When the World's Columbia Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893, scores of ragtime pianists gathered there from many parts of the central states. What the appearance of published rags in the late 1890's marked was actually the beginning of a stylized, classicized form of ragtime. Classic rags were intended to be played exactly as written, without improvisation, and in a moderate tempo. Contrary to statements found in numerous books, classic ragtime was not an early style of jazz, nor a way of playing within the jazz idiom. (It did, of course, have an influence on jazz performers, especially on the Harlem stride piano school that emerged around the First World War.) Rather, it was the transformation of a style of folk performance into a "classical" form of composed music. Admittedly, the impetus for the transformation was the potential of the parlor piano market, but the compositions themselves required the talents of accomplished pianists.

The classic ragtime style was well established by the first few years of this century, particularly in the works of Scott Joplin (1868-1917). Joplin, like many others, had been an itinerant performer. He left his native Texarkana at fourteen, played through Missouri, Kansas, and Arkansas, and then settled for a while in St. Louis in 1885. In the spots along St. Louis' Market and Chestnut Streets, jig piano thrived. Honest John Turpin's Silver Dollar, a saloon, was a principal meeting place where performers gathered, shared ideas, and coached the younger men in the techniques of ragging a tune. When Joplin returned to St. Louis from the Chicago fair in 1893, he began playing at the Rosebud Cafe, which had been opened by Honest John's son Tom Turpin (1873-1922), himself a rag composer and a major figure in the music's development. At the Rosebud, Joplin came in contact with such ragtime writers as Joe Jordan, Sam Patterson, Charles Warfield, and the gifted Louis Chauvin (1883-1908), who collaborated with Joplin on Heliotrope Bouquet. In 1896, Joplin settled in Sedalia, Missouri, where he became a mentor to Arthur Marshall (1881-1956) and Scott Hayden (1882-1915), both of whom collaborated with him on some rags. And it

was in Sedalia that Joplin, a performer at the Maple Leaf Club, created his spectacular Maple Leaf Rag. Published in 1899, Maple Leaf was a huge success, both commercially and artistically. After it had been accepted for publication, the composer told Arthur Marshall, "The Maple Leaf will make me King of Ragtime Composers." He was right; almost immediately it sold over a million copies of sheet music.

Ragtime historians sometimes speak of the music developing in several stages. The Sedalia style, which Joplin championed, is characterized largely by graceful, felicitous melodic lines, a generally even-marked "oom-pah" bass, and moderate tempos. By 1900, a second school of playing had developed in St. Louis; this was a showier, less legato style, with faster tempos and less "oom-pah". (However, the flashy, rickey-tik, breakneck-tempo style of performance often associated with honky tonk piano was still foreign to authentic classic ragtime.) A third style was heard in New Orleans, where such performers as Tony Jackson and Jelly Roll Morton added a rolling bass line, a slower but more forceful rhythm in the character of a stomp, and began to approach a jazz feeling. An Eastern school, centered in New York and New Jersey, emerged in the early Teens; drawing on the background of pianists from Virginia and the Carolinas, it evolved into the stride piano style of such jazz artists as James P. Johnson, Luckey Roberts, and Willie "the Lion" Smith.

Beyond these schools, however, ragtime underwent significant changes in the hands of a few composers. In the first decade of the century, for example, James Scott (1886-1938) emerged as a major writer. His Frog Legs Rag, published in 1906, marked a change in style toward more powerful, brilliant rags. Joplin, in 1907 and 1908, also moved toward increased artistry and sophistication with rags that are more subdued, longer, and more fluid. For example, his Searchlight Rag from this period is unusually fluid in its contrapuntal left-hand passages, and Fig Leaf Rag, one of his finest, displays stronger harmonies and a rather dignified cast. From 1909 on, he became still more ambitious with his Euphonic Sounds, Magnetic Rag, and the ragtime opera Treemonisha.

Writing in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat in June 1903, Monroe H. Rosenfeld said that "Joplin's ambition is to shine in other spheres. He affirms that it is only a pastime for him to compose syncopated music and he longs for more arduous work. To this end he is assiduously toiling upon an opera, nearly a score of the numbers of which he has already composed and which he hopes give an early production in this city." Rosenfeld was referring to Joplin's first opera, A Guest of Honor, which has long been lost. Although he was in error in calling Joplin's interest in syncopated music a "pastime", he was correct in writing of the composer's ambition. Joplin undoubtedly saw himself as more than a composer of brief piano works. In 1902, he published The Ragtime Dance, which he had produced three years earlier at Wood's Opera House in Sedalia, complete with choreography, orchestration, and a vocal part; and in 1909 he went to work earnestly on his second opera, Treemonisha, an enormous effort. His problems in publishing the opera and his failure to mount more than a single, incomplete production of it were the causes of his mental breakdown and his death in 1917.

By the time that Joplin completed Treemonisha, the ragtime movement as a whole was in decline. It was, in a sense, too well received to survive. It became so popular that publishers inundated the market with simplified arrangements, pseudo-ragtime, and songs with ragtime titles that had no resemblance at all to the real music. In an article for the Harvard Musical Review in 1914, John N. Burk noted the breakdown: "When ragtime

was entirely in the hands of the Negroes to whom its origin is due, it had little of its modern taints .... Its happy, carefree nature... was created with an irresponsible love of music and an extraordinary sense of rhythm." The "modern taints", a flooded market, and the fact that the classic piano rag was an entity that did not really lend itself to further innovation all worked together to bring the ragtime craze to an end by the time of Joplin's death.

Nevertheless, a rich repertoire of rag by Joplin, Scott, Joseph Lamb, and a few others still exists and is deserving of our attention today. In an unusually perceptive article for the Boston Musical Record in 1899, novelist Rupert Hughes wrote, "I feel safe in predicting that ragtime has come to stay, that it will be taken up and developed into a great dance-form to be handled with respect, not only by a learning body of Negro creators, but by the scholarly musicians of the whole world." The ragtime revival that has taken place during the past couple of years has finally borne out Hughes' words; several concert pianists are now programming rags, some fine recordings have been released, Treemonisha has received its long-awaited premiere (1972) with a new orchestration by black composer T. J. Anderson, and Joplin's collected works have been published.

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BOOK REVIEW

By Tex Wyndham

"A Tribute To Scott Joplin And The Giants Of Ragtime", collected and with an introduction by Richard Zimmerman, published @ $5.95 by Charles Hansen.

An excellent folio of music to 45 rags and cakewalks, much of which, to my knowledge, has not been previously reissued. Several well-known ragtime composers are represented (the two Joplin pieces, "Maple Leaf Rag" and "The Entertainer", being the only tunes easily available otherwise), while the material covers a satisfactory range of difficulty, quite a number of rather easy works being present along with more challenging stuff.

Two exceptional features of the collection are:

(1) the full measure of first-class, but virtually unknown, works by relatively obscure composers, and

(2) the unearthing of several examples of that special rarity -- a quality rag that can be mastered by a dedicated beginner who has a basic understanding of keyboard technique.

In the first group, try, among others, Sydney P. Harris' full-bodied "Virginia Rag", F. Henri Klickmann's frisky "Smiles and Chuckles", Elmer Olson's swinging "Town Talk", and J. M. Wilcockson's easy-rolling masterpiece (one I've personally wanted to see widely available for some time) "Pride Of The Smoky Row". In the second, inexperienced but ambitious ticklers can have the enjoyment of tackling widely-recognized top-rank ragtimers with hope of success via such selections as the relatively lightly-scored "On The

Pike" (James Scott) and "Tar Babies" (Charles L. Johnson) -- as well as the popular and undemanding cakewalks of Kerry Mills ("At A Georgia Camp Meeting", "'Leven Forty-Five From The Hotel", "Whistling Rufus") and Abe Holzmann ("Bunch O' Blackberries", "Smoky Mokes").

Several readers may have noted that the volume does duplicate some numbers offered a few years ago in the Society's limited-edition Reprint Club or in Max Morath's now out-of-print compilation "100 Ragtime Classics". Nevertheless, about half the titles are receiving their first commercial reproduction during the ragtime revival, and these alone would be a bargain at the $5.95 price.

Space limitations do not permit a complete listing, but included are the likes of Percy Wenrich, Charles Hunter, Henry Lodge, Joe Jordan, Paul Pratt, Ben Harney, and others whose distinctive contributions to ragtime have been generally acknowledged since "They All Played Ragtime" first appeared. An essential purchase for the ragophile-pianist.

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RAGTIMER JOHNNY MADDOX

Prior to the demise of Toronto's Ragtime Centre "CLUB 76" in the early 60's, John was one of the most popular regulars to appear repeatedly year after year. In recent years John has only been able to spare enough time out of a busy entertainer's life to make brief visits to Toronto. He is remembered most for his enormous talent in the performance of ragtime with all its nuances. John can present ragtime in any style you wish to name. To the delight of ragtime purists, he will play classical ragtime with authentic care and expression and with corresponding pace. The private John Maddox is a lover of ragtime. He has been a member of our SOCIETY since the first year of its formation and has constantly kept in touch throughout the years which followed. With John, enduring friendship is important and we too have valued his friendship as a person and a fellow ragtimer.

In the commercial world of music and entertainment there is another side to John in which he is equally at home and where he receives public acclaim and adulation. It is in that milieu that John becomes the Johnny Maddox of Crazy Otto fame, which brings us to the Cherry Creek Inn at Denver, Colorado, where he now spends the greater part of each year.

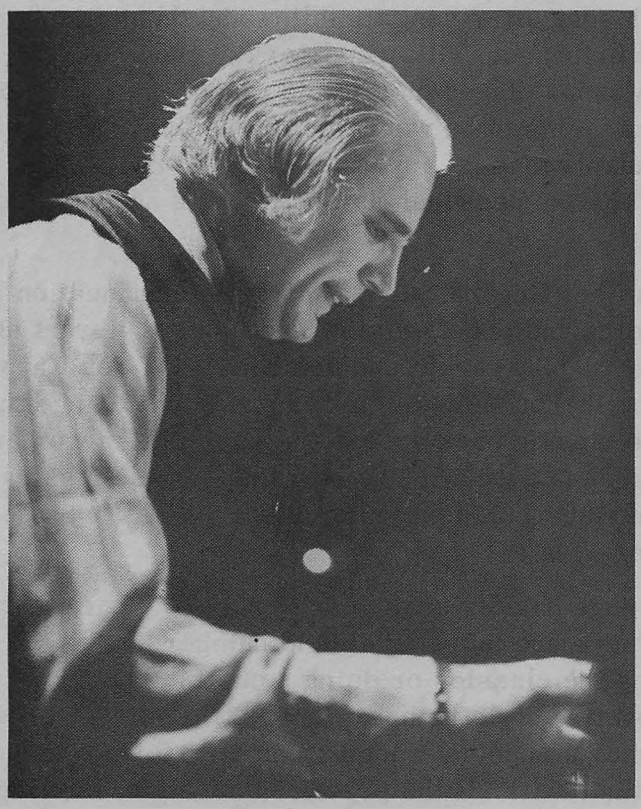
We are grateful to member Dorothy Melinsky of Denver for a copy of her article about John which appeared in the Denver Jazz Club News of February 14, 1975, and for a copy of the photo taken by Fred Moldenhauer, former president of the Denver Jazz Club. The following is a reprint ot that article:

AN EVENING WITH CRAZY OTTO

Out on South Colorado Boulevard an oversized, spike-heeled, crimson slipper revolves atop a tall sign pole. Beneath the slipper is a myriad of twinkly neons, then a fine-line silhouette of a piano man. But catch that lower, more restrained sign which, at various times of the year, states simply, "CRAZY OTTO TONIGHT".

To the youngers among us the gimmicky name may be a puzzler. A new rock guy on the scene, maybe? At this wonderment we in-the-knows can (happily!) say, "No way." But don't back off; the audience inside is showing up more youthful all the time - and more about the nickname later. To a seasoned piano buff the presence of Crazy Otto could evoke something akin to ecstasy. So, regardless of age brackets, why not swing your car into the parking lot and wander into the lobby of the Cherry Creek Inn. Unless you are suffering from empty spots in your soul, you can find an evening of inimitable music that goes along somewhat like the following.

Just outside the swinging doors an easel-type placard proclaims further: "NOW PLAYING - THE RED SLIPPER ROOM - CRAZY OTTO - JOHNNY MADDOX - RAGTIME PIANO - JAZZ INTERPRETOR - EXCITING ENTERTAINER" An attached glossy print showa an attractive, trimly-built man in relaxed pose, one foot propped on a chair. In photo Johnny Maddox (or Crazy Otto, if you like) appears as he is - approachable, welcoming, and outgoing - and about as sane as any man on this weary ole' planet.



If you are in or near this writer's generation, by now your nostalgia antenna is surely aquiver. Ah, yes! Johnny Maddox of those marvelous records that started showing up in the early fifties. Like "San Antonio Rose", "Memphis Blues", "Near You", "Coconut Grove", and innumerable others. Then later the albums: "The Ragtime Twenties", "Dixieland Blues", "King of Ragtime", "Old-Fashioned Love", "Ragtime Melodies", "Johnny Maddox Plays The Million Sellers"; and of course, that wildly successful "Crazy Otto Medley".

Once inside the red-decored lounge, trying for a nearby table is desirable. Watching John Maddox' expressive keyboard technique is a joy alone. One look around is usually sufficient to locate the man. He wears, always, a trim black suit, vest, and a fat black bow-tie, the dark severity broken only by a wide-striped shirt. Tucked into his vest pocket is an old-fashioned, long-chained gold watch. The outfit sets off quite effectively his collar-length, iron-grey hair and sideburns. In person Johnny Maddox is distinctive on any scene.

It's a little before entertainment time, which usually begins at 8:30 p. m. and runs until 1:30 a. m. This is every night except Sunday for whatever stint Maddox plays. Already the room is busy with the Inn's guests, the dropins, and the regulars. And regulars there are when Johnny is in town.

He moves among the tables, stopping to say friendly words to new faces as well as those he knows on a first-name basis. Seeing him mingle freely and confidently makes it believable that being an easy circulator will help to create pre-entertainment notice.

But a drink-guzzling, chatter-happy roomful of people as a listening audience? It's no secret in the entertainment world that many accomplished artists find this area of public appearance worrisome and steer wide of it. Contrarily, this piano man not only welcomes it but copes so well that he is recognized for that ability almost (but not quite) as much as for his keyboard expertise.

He works his way toward the piano stage, draping his suit coat on a wall hook. Up on the spotlighted platform he uses the hand mike to say something akin to, "Good evening, folks, and welcome. It's nice to have you here . . . This will be a warm-up set . . . later on I'll get into more complicated tunes and then I'll do some of your favorites . . . ."

The melodies begin. For Johnny Maddox this may be just a "warm-up set" but at the very first notes that ripple off that old, open-faced piano it is pure heaven to a music-lovin' person. In short time the cocktailers are responding generously with applause.

And so the evening moves along with song after song tumbling and dancing off the keyboard as the result of Maddox' pianistic brilliance. His repertory of the good old tunes (the promise is, "There'll be no new tunes played on this old piano.") is those of the late thirties and backwards to 1890, and seems to be wonderfully endless. All doubt about audience response is gone. The nickname may be a useful billing gimmick, but once Johnny uses the piano keys it is clear that no personal flamboyancy is needed. His music is the command.

The tunes spill and bounce from his fleet fingers. It's a fantastic continuation of melodies that are sweet and gentle; resounding and precise; slow and bluesy; vibrant and dramatic - and just pure ragtime and jazz. Like "Frankie and Johnnie"; Do You Know What It Means To Miss New Orleans"; "Ace In The Hole" - on this one Maddox' righthand darts to the far left of the keyboard to come ripping back across the keys in a movement so rapid as to suffer no loss of tempo; "Three O'Clock In The Morning" - his classical ability comes shining through; "Maple Leaf Rag"; "Muskrat Ramble"; "Twelfth Street Rag"; "The Dallas Blues"; and "Millenberg Joys".

These are only a small dip into the huge bag of songs Johnny plays. There are German waltzes and World War I tunes. There are more Dixieland numbers; love songs; ballads; and blues. He is capable of ragging the classics or doing something nearly classical to the rags in that brilliantly innovative style he has. The "St. Louis Blues" comes out in original one-step, in tango time, as boogie-woogie, and as a foxtrot. Watching him maneuver the keys it seems that, with all the practiced surety of his fingers, he is still ever seeking and finding the unexpected rhythms and sounds. You can listen to the same song several times and hear sparkling new syncopations each time around. Johnny used his personal collection of piano rolls, sheet music, and records to listen, study, and learn - then to carve out his own approach to all of it.

The Maddox technique is ripply and rich in complex chords and tricky tempos, yet he plays quite free of the keyboard. While conversing with someone directly to his right or left (or even over his shoulder) he maintains that marvelous syncopation. The music seems to pour from his hands in total fusion of a soul-healing, mind-purefying sound. Perched on that tipsy-looking piano stool, both feet stomping out the beat, it is plain to see that John Maddox plays happily, and with love.

By request time, which he welcomes (except for "Alley Cat!") things are downright informal in the lounge. While at the mike announcing the next round of songs in his casual, lowkeyed way - interspersed with just enough information about various jazz composers - he's apt to take time to hail newcomers or respond to questions and comments from anyone in the room. For almost five hours, with only brief rest periods, Maddox commits himself alertly to varying combinations of people. Actually he is "on stage" from the moment he strides into the lounge, until the last note. Wherever he plays there is no shortage of music that edges into the heart and mind with a staying power far beyond going-home time.

At the midnight rest period, after which Johnny's hands seldom leave the keys until 1:30 in the morn, it seems appropriate to go over the background of this man who has so artistically preserved the tunes of past years.

Born in Gallatin, Tennessee, John S. Maddox, Jr. is one of four children - but the only one touched with music. At the tender age of three years he took to the piano. Under the tutelage of four teachers he learned classical, popular, and ragtime simultaneously. One teacher was his great aunt, a ragtime pianist of those years. It is probable that she was the most influential in shaping John's eventual musical direction.

It took young Maddox all of two years to get around to his first public musical appearance, in a classical concert. But around the age of eight he began collecting piano rolls and old ragtime sheet music and steadily became a student of ragtime and jazz. Still he continued studying the classics for some 19 years.

By his early teens Johnny had gravitated rather naturally onto the dance band scene in and around Gallatin. This stretched from 1939 until 1950, during which time he also worked at a local record shop. The inception and success of Randy's Record Shop is another story. For purposes of this article it is enough to say that out of it came Randy Wood's decision to manufacture records. He asked Maddox to do a recording. A couple of tunes called "Crazy Bone Rag" and "St. Louis Tickle" were put together with J. O. Templeton and the Rhythmasters. This first record sold 23,000 copies in three weeks. It was kind of a birth of twins - that of Dot Records, Inc., Gallatin, Tennessee; and Johnny Maddox as a recording star.

Four years later Maddox was feted at a Chicago convention as the country's No. 1 jukebox artist. This honor was bestowed by the people who happily counted all those nickles pouring into the mechanical music gadgets, the Music Operators of America. The October 9, 1954, issue of Billboard magazine gave all of page 37 over to "DOT'S BOOMING #1 STYLIST - JOHNNY MADDOX AND THE RHYTHMASTERS - A BIG ONE - BLUE HAWAII AND PATTONA RAG . . . PEG O'MY HEART AND TEDDY BEAR BLUES . . ." Obviously, ragtime and popular music had won out in the life of John Maddox.

Then came 1955, when Bill Randell of radio station W E R E of Cleveland, Ohio, suggested that Johnny record solo a group of tunes under the title of "The Crazy Otto Medley". This instant hit remained on the best-seller list for 14 consecutive weeks, selling over two million copies. It gave Maddox his first "gold" record and a sort of second musical birth; but it was to become a real controversy in the ragtime world.

It seems that shortly after the "Medley" was released by Dot Records, another record company took the name and applied it to a German pianist who had billed himself as "Der Schrage" (translated, "the drunken one"), "Schragen Otto", "Happy Otto", and later as "Crazy Otto". This posed the question of: Who is the real Crazy Otto - the American

or the German? Investigations arose, were completed, and showed that Johnny Maddox was and is the original Crazy Otto. A copyright was attempted but found unavailable under copyright laws. The "Medley" was cited by Billboard as being the first all-piano record in recording history to sell a million platters.

Further recordings were additionally successful. Between 1950 and 1971 sales of Maddox records climbed to some 11 million on the 87 singles and 40 albums released, and resulted in eight more gold records for Johnny. Among the recordings were those done from his personal collection of old piano rolls, because he knew that certain of these were originals played by James P. Johnson, Scott Joplin, Felix Arndt, Ray Bargy, and other notable ragtimers of the past. Presently, Johnny owns no piano, although he confesses to a sentimental hope of acquiring a certain grand piano on which he took early lessons.

John Maddox says now, "It was the recordings that started me on the road. I've been on the road for about 25 years, if you count my dance band days - 35 years in the business." He recalls his first stint as being at the Bachelor Club, Dallas, Texas. In time "home" had changed from Gallatin to Minneapolis for more centralization to his bookings. These have reached into every state except Hawaii and Oregon.

This is Crazy Otto's fourteenth year entertaining in and out of Denver, always at the Inn. His contract here calls for 23 weeks spaced out over the year. When queried as to his feelings about the city, he instantly cited it as the one city he could "easily settle into". If such a time comes, Denver should be quite proud to count this delightful entertainer among its residents.

As to the status of ragtime, Maddox says that, "Thanks to a lot of people it has been rediscovered. I am glad so many young people are interested in it." He is also pleased that his four sons, ranging in ages from 14 to 19, "all love ragtime."

Through the years of playing in cocktail lounges and piano bars John Maddox has truly met the challenge of holding audience attention as few musicians ever have in such an atmosphere. His infectious dedication to the tunes of past eras, attached of course to a tremendous keyboard versatility, grabs at the people. Add the fact that he is an affable, no-pretense guy who seems to enjoy the human race and - well, it's a winning combination. After an evening of such happy music the rather inadequate question of "How do you do it?" is apt to pop out. Johnny says simply and sincerely, "It's great fun. I love it."

Maddox admits to a two-headed satisfaction - that of personal contact with audiences, and enough applause and adulation to parallel a stage performance. "It's less taxing than doing a concert, although some places are so quiet you could hear a pin drop - almost like a concert," he says. He has also become a man of several homes, since he usually remains long enough (or is around by repetition) in various cities to make friends and acquire a feeling for each city. In his away-from-the-piano hours he enjoys other art forms such as live theater, ballet, concerts, and reading nonfiction. He is also still a collector of old sheet music and records.

Regrettably, most Maddox recordings have themselves become collectors' items. Two exceptions are "Johnny Maddox Plays The Million Sellers", which might yet be found in some shops around town; and a two-record reissue called the Twinset put out last summer by Famous Music Corporation of New York under the title of "Johnny Maddox Piano Roll Greats". This is also on eight-track cartridge.

In the world of ragtime a book titled "They All Played Ragtime" (by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis) has long been considered "the Bible" to both players and listeners of this fascinating form of music. Now in its fourth revised edition, the book credits Maddox in two prominent ways. First, for his Crazy Otto Medley of 1955 as being the first vehicle to put ragtime back into the million category; not since Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" had ragtime sold a million of anything. Second, for being a "professor" whose extensive knowledge of and deep interest in its history have assisted greatly in elevating ragtime to the level of respectable cocktail lounges and supper clubs.

But back to the Inn. It's now "wrapping it up" time, as John puts it. At the mike he says, "Folks, this is it for tonight. Goodnight and thank you for being so nice . . . finish your drinks . . . drive carefully. And come again."

The music is ended, but memories have been stirred and renourished. For some they are newborn. Departure is a time of reluctance. Yet there is a kind of glow to take home - that of knowing there can be more of such pure entertainment because a guy who took on the cocktail circuit some years ago continues to maintain an indefatigable schedule. In this way only can he bring us his fine talent in such a wonderfully warm and unstructured manner.

Someone once wrote that the world is full of piano players but there is only one Johnny Maddox. On a last December night at the Inn a local minstrel man-around-town (who later marveled to this writer at the quietude of the patrons when Maddox is at the piano) stated publicly that "Denver people are lucky to have this guy around." The numerous admirers of John Maddox (alias Crazy Otto) heartily subscribe to both statements.

At this writing Maddox was playing Denver for six weeks that ran through January 4, 1975. From January 6 through February 1 he entertained at the Village Motor Inn, Missoula, Montana. At this printing he is playing through March 1 at the Heritage Motor Inn, Great Falls, Montana. From there a hop back east to the Summit Manor, Alexandria, Virginia, and probably back to The Northern Hotel, Billings, Montana, until his return to Denver. Later in the fall it might be the Cascade Room in Tacoma and the Legend Room in Northgate, Seattle, Washington, and so on.

If you've not spent an evening with Crazy Otto, try it for some of the most unwinding music imaginable. You may even see familiar faces listening, such as present and past members of the Queen City Jazz Band, or fellow Club members. You'll have to wait a spell, though, like until May 12 when he comes back for a stretch that will run through June 28. Keep it in mind; mark your calendar - better yet, I'll keep you posted. It's a wait that you just might find most worthwhile.

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THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL NATIONAL RAGTIME FESTIVAL

GOLDENROD SHOWBOAT - ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 1975

The advance information gives the dates of July 7 (Mon.) to July 12 (Sat.). The package price will be $20.00 for the six days. Tickets for admission on a daily basis will also be sold. An imposing lineup of Bands and Ragtime Pianists is scheduled.

(GOLDENROD SHOWBOAT (FOOT OF LOCUST ST.) ST. LOUIS, MO.)

THE RED BACK BOOK

The Red Back Book - Scott Joplin, edited by Gunther Schuller (Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp. Mills/MCA Joint Venture, Melville, N. Y. 11746), includes The Cascades, Sunflower Slow Drag, The Chrysanthemum, The Entertainer, The Ragtime Dance, Sugar Cane, The Easy Winners, and Maple Leaf Rag.

In view of the popularity of Gunther Schuller's album of rags, it is interesting to look back on incomplete information about the original, Red Back Book as first published during the ragtime era by Stark Music Company in the early years of this century.

In consulting reference material, one source states that the first orchestrated arrangement of Joplin's ragtime melodies, "Fifteen Standard High Class Rags", was popularly known by its New Orleans nickname "The Red Back Book".

Another source provides additional details with a somewhat different shading:

"The Red Back Book" was the nickname given the collection of classic rags published in the teens by Stark Music Company because of its red covers. Each instrument of the orchestra had a different "red-back book" with its own parts. Inside were reprints of rags which had previously been published separately for orchestra. They included "Maple Leaf Rag" (Arranger unknown); "The Cascades" (Arranged by E. J. Stark); "The Easy Winners" (Arranger unknown); "The Ragtime Dance" (Short version - arranger unknown); "The Chrysanthemum" (arranger unknown); "African Pas" (By Maurice Kirwin, arranger unknown); "Ophelia Rag"(Arranged by Rocco Venuto); "The Minstrel Man" (Arranged by E. J. Stark); "Frog Legs Rag" (Arranged by Scott Joplin!); "Sensation Rag" (Arranged by Rocco Venuto); "Kinklets" (Arranged by E. J. Stark); "Grace and Beauty" (Arranger unknown); and "Sunflower Slow Drag" (Arranged by D. S. DeLisle, who also arranged the piano version of Turpin's "Harlem Rag"). Notice that Joplin wrote less than half of those rags, contrary to published claims.

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EUBIE BLAKE GOES TO HARVARD

(Ed. Comment: He's here!, he's there!, he's everywhere! Marion Blake must have a busy time just keeping track of her on-the-go husband. Leland Erickson of Rochester, N. Y. sent along the following report from Christian Science Monitor dated February 10, 1975):

"We're Just Wild About Eubie"

Harvard University last week honored another venerable but still lively institution - Eubie Blake.

If Mr. Blake were only the composer of "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "Memories of You", he would lay his own capitivating claim on the public ear no less than, say, T. S.

Eliot, whose reception by a Harvard audience at the peak of his poetic fame came to mind when Mr. Blake received repeated standing ovations at the same classic Sanders Theater Friday night.

But, with all due respect, Mr. Blake performs his works better than Eliot ever did, and for the past decade or so of his return from obscurity he has been proving that age cannot wither nor custom stale a man who really knows how to play the piano.

So university spokesmen rightly said that Harvard was honoring itself in honoring Mr. Blake on his 92nd birthday. "We're just wild about Eubie," sang Emme Kemp and Mary Louise, two fellow entertainers who are beginning a tour to bring the Blake music to the campus circuit. And Harvard obviously agreed, as it rushed Mr. Blake from event to event - with students who had inspired the whole thing complaining that he had more energy than they did. He was still going strong at the Faculty Club at midnight after the main concert; professors and students hung on his sharp-focused words of reminiscence about his old partner Noble Sissle, choir leader Hall Johnson, jazz star Benny Goodman, and others.

An eloquent footnote to changing times was Harvard's asking Mrs. Eva Fisher to take a bow from the audience. Mr. Blake's senior by a few years, Mrs. Fisher ran a Boston rooming house where he, Duke Ellington, Bill Robinson, and other black entertainers stayed in the days when they were not welcome at the downtown hotels. That was "far back, far back," Mrs. Fisher now recalls. Eubie Blake at Harvard was both a reminder of progress and a heartlifting ragtime challenge to keep it going.

(Ed. Comment: On March 9, 1975 Tex Wyndham wrote about Eubie's visit to the University of Delaware):

"Eubie played a concert at the University of Delaware about two weeks ago, and he and Carl Seltzer came over to my house for a while afterwards. Eubie was in fine form, playing even better than his last appearance at the Bash. Carl told me that Eubie is publishing a folio of sheet music to several of his tunes (Carl is not sure of the exact titles). That should be something to look forward to. With his characteristic generosity toward younger ragtimers, Eubie stopped his show just before intermission and had me stand up and take a bow to his standing-room-only crowd, adding several favorable remarks and generally making me look good before my hometown audience. A great guy."

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REMINDER NOTICE

THE 11TH ANNUAL RAGTIME SOCIETY BASH - 1975

To be held at the CARA INN, TORONTO, on the weekend of Saturday, October 18, 1975

This will be the fifth year in a row at the same location with a general duplication of arrangements.

HAVE YOU RESERVED THE DATE ON YOUR CALENDAR OF EVENTS YOU INTEND TO TAKE IN NEXT FALL?

(detailed particulars will be published at a later date in THE RAGTIMER)

LETTERS

Letters are welcome from members. Excerpts believed to be of general interest are passed along in this section of THE RAGTIMER.

(Ed. Comment: Amelia Lamb, the widow of ragtime composer Joseph F. Lamb, and his son Joe Lamb, Jr. attended the Ragtime Society Annual Bash last October. A few weeks later we received three new applications for membership. The "Ragtime is alive and well" theme lives on with the descendants of the great composer.)

I was only 5 years old when my great uncle, Joe Lamb died in 1960. Joe Lamb, Jr. gave us the information about the Society.

Mary Van Gieson, Hillsdale, N.J., U.S.A.

I am Joe Lamb Sr.'s nephew. On July 15, 1960 I was sitting by his piano for 5 or 6 hours talking and listening to him play and compose.

Paul Van Gieson, Hillsdale, N.J., U.S.A.

I am a nephew of Joseph F. Lamb (1887-1960).

Geo. A. Van Gieson Jr., E. Keansburg, N.J., U.S.A.

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Lance Camarena, San Joe, California, U.S.A. (Student at C. State University) writes:

In my music class towards the end of the semester a "Musicum Collegium" project was required. This is a written report and live performance of a piece of work. The class heard a few Bach inventions and much other related music.

By chance I was the last to give my report. I passed out copies of the work I intended to play, gave my report on ragtime and then played MAPLE LEAF RAG. My report was warmly accepted with applause. I later found out several others in my class are into playing ragtime. (Oh! - my final grade by the way an A-!)

(Ed. Comment: Congratulations - Even if Joplin were alive today he would have trouble raising the grade above A- for ragtime. But you and others are doing a great job of raising classical ragtime to its rightful position in musical rankings. If we all keep trying we'll eventually push it through the top.)

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George Foley, 2869 Berkshire Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, U.S.A.

Would like to meet other ragtime enthusiasts in the Cleveland area.

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Max Morath played to a sellout crowd at Wilmington's Grand Opera House, an old theater which is being restored by the city, this past Friday (March 7th). I couldn't go, as my band had to play our regular job at The Surrey, but Nancy went and said it was great. She, Max, and two members of his staff came out to The Surrey for dinner afterwards, catching the last two sets and giving us a chance to chat. He's quite busy, of course, appearing in Boston today and generally touring the northeast for a while.

Tex Wyndham, Mendenhall, Penn., U.S.A.

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We feature ragtime in our store (Fitchburg Music Store, Inc., 175 Main St.). Max Morath is coming to Fitchburg, Friday and Saturday, April 18th and 19th at the Galaxy Room of George R. Wallace Jr. Civic Center.

Gerry Martel and Geo. R. Wallace, Jr.
Fitchburg, Mass., U.S.A.

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W. J. Hyder, Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Sent us details of a Scott Joplin Pop Concert at the Peabody Conservatory of Music Tuesday, November 19, 1974. It was held in the Peabody Concert Hall with the Peabody Ragtime Ensemble and guest artists performing the music of Scott Joplin and other black composers.

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Mrs. Burke Murdock, Highlands, Texas, U.S.A.

Sent us preliminary information about the Houston Grand Opera plans for the production of Joplin's "Treemonisha" for the Spring Opera Festival on May 23rd. Gunther Schuller has been commissioned to prepare the musical orchestrations. Director for the opera will be Frank Corsaro.

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Peter Lundberg, Vik toriagatan 11, 411 25 Goteborg, Sweden.

Would like to receive cassette tapes of any parts of Bashes anyone would be kind enough to send.

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SOMETHING DOING...

JOHN ARPIN - Solo piano in the Brandy Tree, The Prince Hotel, Cor. York Mills & Don Mills Roads, 5:30 to 8:00 p. m. Then leads band in Le Continental Dining Room, Monday to Saturday.

STEEN CHRISTENSEN - at the Mechanical Music Museum (MMM), Vesterbrogade 150, Copenhagen (Denmark), every 2nd & 4th Wednesday each month.

BOB DURST - (RAJAH OF RAGTIME) at the Holiday Inn N. E. Louisville, Ky. March 31 thru May 3rd.

DON EWELL - at the Life Lounge, 3233 N. Ocean Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with Andy Bartha and the Deep South Dixieland Jazz Band.

PETER FAHRENHOLTZ - plays solo ragtime piano and with bands - regularly at Jacob's Bar BQ, Arhus and at Stenkaelderen, Arhus (Hjortshøj, Denmark)

"GASLIGHT" GALE FOEHNER - at Rochester, N. Y. - Regularly performing ragtime and sing-a-longs with slides at concerts and private party engagements.

DOUG FRASER - Entertainer, Singer, Banjo with Heartaches Razz Band, Vancouver, B. C. Does travelling one-nighters.

JIM KAPLAN - at the Pizza-Stein, 1428 W. Galena Ave., Freeport, Illinois on Tuesday, Friday and Sundays.

JOHN MADDOX - at Cherry Creek Inn, Denver, Colorado May 12 to June 28 and from August 4 to September 27.

KEN MAYHERCY - (RAGTIME $ BILL) Plays regularly at the Ramada Inns at Casper and Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

MIKE MONTGOMERY - at The Dakota Inn, Rathskeller, Detroit, Michigan, Friday nights.

MAX MORATH - on the road with his new show "The Ragtime Years".

DR. ELI NEWBERGER - and The New Black Eagle Jazz Band at the Stickey Wicket Pub, West Main Street, Hopkinton, Mass., Thursday 8:00 p. m. to 12:00 p. m. (Pianist is Bob Pilsbury.)

TOM NOEL - on the road with his living portrayal show "Mark Twain at Home". Tom has a new impersonation in his performances: "Mr. Jelly Lord" based on the career of Jelly Roll Morton.

CHARLIE RASCH - with SISTER KATE, at the Cow Palace, Bancroft Road about 8 miles west of Toledo, Ohio, Fridays and Saturdays 9:00 p. m. on.

TOM SCHMUTZLER - and the Hardware City Temperance and ragtime Society, at Shakey's Pizza Parlor, Vernon, Conn. - Fridays and Saturdays.

BOB SEELEY - plays at "Bobbies" Restaurant and Lounge, 30100 Telegraph Road (between 12 and 13 Mile Roads) Southfield, Michigan, 5:00 p. m. to 7:00 p. m. Tues. thru Friday.

DAN SUMMERS - and the New Charleston Chasers (with the ODJB sound), at Speak Steak House, Whirlpool St. at Cleveland Avenue, Niagara Falls, N. Y., Saturday nights and some Friday nights.

TREBOR TICHENOR - on The Goldenrod Showboat, at St. Louis, Missouri. Does weekly radio show on Sunday 8:00 p. m. - KWMU - FM 90.7 called "RAGOPHILE with Trebor Tichenor".

TERRY WALDO - at Engine House #5, German Village, Columbus, Ohio, Wednesday and Thursday 9:00 p. m. to 12:00 p. m. (when not on the road).

- at the Kerville Folk Festival, Kerville, Texas, May 22 - 25.

TEX WYNDHAM - and The Red Lion Jazz Band, appearing regularly, at The Surrey Restaurant, 1101 Philadelphia Pike, Wilmington, Delaware.

BILL ZINN - and Zinn's Ragtime String Quartet doing Concerts and College dates in the New York area.

PERFORMERS: Please keep us posted on your whereabouts and your schedule will appear in this column.

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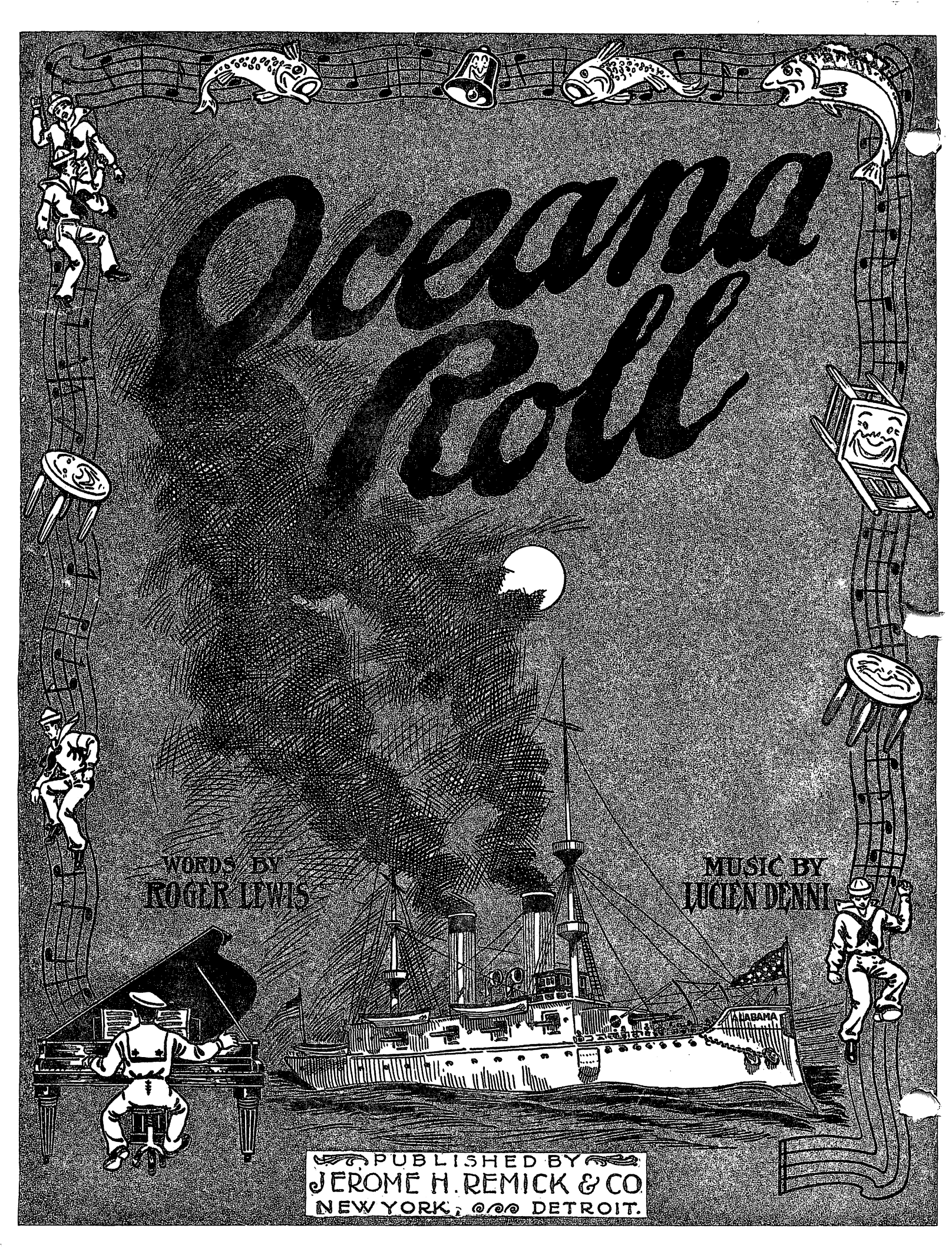
Ocean Cole



WORDS BY
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MUSIC BY
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PUBLISHED BY
JEROME H. REMICK & CO.
NEW YORK, DETROIT.